

How does my dementia diagnosis impact my daily life?

I was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2016. Having other close family members having the disease made me very aware of what was happening to me. My close friends were commenting about my behaviour. My walking gait had altered and I was falling on our walks. I was repeating myself often. My driving ability was causing me great concern. I was using satnav even driving familiar routes as I was driving on autopilot without it.

So, I took myself off to the GP and she sent me to the Memory clinic in Barnstaple. I had the usual tests and I was told that I had mild cognitive impairment caused by Alzheimer's. I was given the drug Memantine and was invited to attend a course for the newly diagnosed and their carers run by the Alzheimer's Society.

I read plenty of books on the subject. Not a good read, especially the prognosis... 7 years? The course was more gloom and doom. Get an LPA, write your will, complete a 'This is Me' booklet for when I needed to go to hospital. All serious stuff.

I read more around the subject and came to the conclusion that I had 2 choices. I could sit and vegetate in my flat, or I could get out and rejoin the human race! Being an outgoing soul, I told the world and his wife of my diagnosis. This was met with great scepticism by some who said 'Of course you haven't'. They were of the assumption that I couldn't possibly have it as I was still *compos mentis*, i.e. 'normal'. They couldn't comprehend that with support, life could continue pretty well.

I had to give up driving, which I was pleased to do. I found it too stressful now. So, it was Shank's Pony or public transport from now on. I joined a lady's gym around the corner from my flat. What an eye opener! Women of all shapes, sizes and ages. I quickly felt comfortable there and joined a balance class as well as doing the daily work-out that was prescribed for me. I tried to fill my time with activities as I found being on my own in the flat came with the dreadful word apathy!

The Alzheimer's Society allocated me a support worker who visited me every 3 months. It was she who put me in touch with Dementia Voice, an online group that met once a week. It was here that I made new friends with lived experience of dementia.

I was in 5 different choirs in North Devon prior to my diagnosis now it was down to the 3 local ones. Then came the Pandemic. No socializing, etc. I filled my time with gardening. There was a huge garden frontage to the flats where I lived. It hadn't been dug over for years. I weeded, dug and planted it up. During the second year of the Pandemic, my daughter persuaded me to relocate from North Devon to Worcester to live in a similar, but much better scheme, near her. Same rules and regulations re meeting others. However, on the plus side, my flat had its own garden. My salvation!

Things slowly returned to something like normality and I made a few good friends here. Whenever I mentioned the word dementia someone would mention a family

member or friend who had it and had died. It was assumed that it was a very unpleasant experience and one they had no intention of adopting. I did tell them that 1 in 3 of us will have it in some form as well as 1 in 2 of us will have a diagnosis of cancer! There is still a feeling of denial around the subject. Once this feeling was about the big C, but now that's readily accepted as fact.

How has my diagnosis changed me? I still have a lot to say, but now I need to pace and prepare myself before committing to do things. I have a lot of fingers in a lot of pies! I think all are connected in some way to dementia. This keeps my brain active. The brain is a muscle and needs exercise. Losing words during conversations or in written work needs quickness of thought in finding a substitute. You also need a sense of humour in delivery.

I think one of my purposes in life is making others aware that there is still a life to be lived after diagnosis. A typical day starts for me at 8.30 with an in-house exercise group with a few like-minded residents. This is something to get up for in the mornings. I like to fill my time with planned activities. I use Zoom and Teams with different dementia-led organisations and I find it hard to fit in the boring stuff like cleaning!

I could go on for much longer giving you my thoughts on dementia and how it affects me. I am constantly banging the drum about the need for more dementia-led activities in my area. Worcester has the worst level of diagnosis in the country. That sits with the lack of awareness of many GP's. It is only by campaigning locally that this is going to change. I hope I am doing my bit in this.